



Role of Policy and Institutions in Local Adaptation to Climate Change

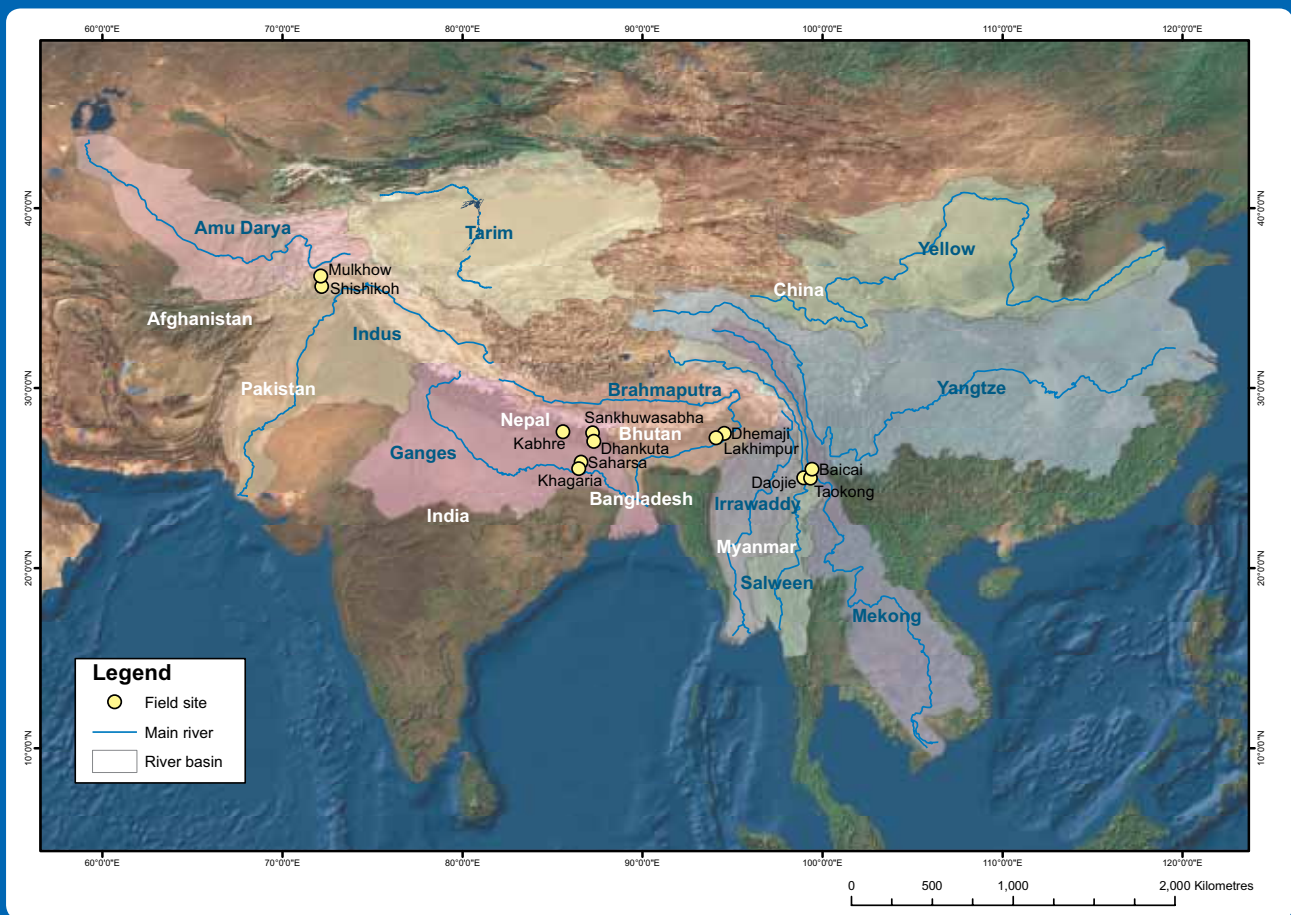
Case studies on responses to too much and too little water in the Hindu Kush Himalayas

With increased climate variability increasing the risk of floods and droughts, problems of too much or too little water are affecting the lives and livelihoods of the people in the Hindu Kush Himalayan region. Climate change is expected to exacerbate some of the conditions causing these problems. Although climate change has been discussed endlessly in international fora, very little ground research has been undertaken on its impacts. ICIMOD's publication *Role of Policy and Institutions in Local Adaptation to Climate Change* addresses this need. The publication is a result of collaboration with the Stockholm Environment Institute (SEI), the International Institute for Environment and Development (IIED), and national partners in China, India, Nepal, and Pakistan since 2008 to document, assess, and – over the long term – strengthen local strategies for adaptation to flood and drought in and downstream from mountain catchments.

The study focuses on four thematic cases: small-scale water management and the role of local institutions; agro-forestry diversification and intensification; infrastructural mitigation measures, including embankments to adapt to floods; and livelihood diversification, including migration. It looks at responses and on-the-ground experiences in terms of common factors, and draws from them key messages useful to those supporting the development of new adaptation approaches, including policy and institutional support.

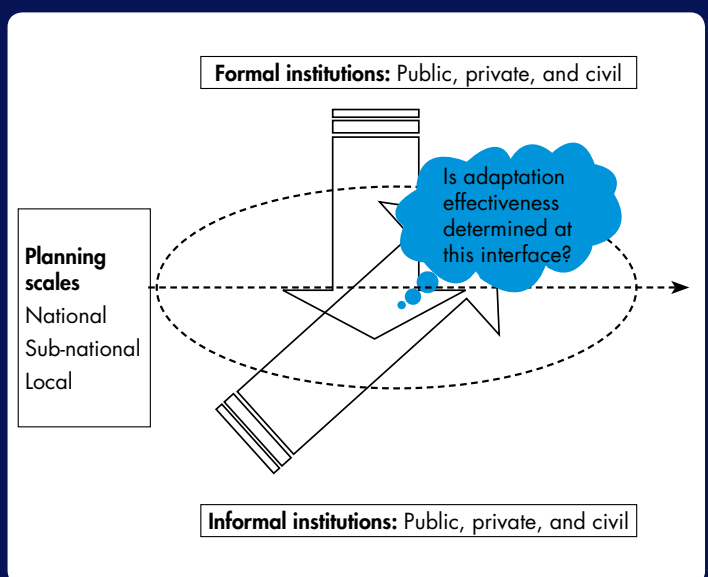
Much of the current research and planning assumes that adaptation will occur largely through government-led or -directed technical interventions. However, the findings of the field research demonstrate the extent to which local households and communities are adapting, and will continue to adapt, through actions that are independent of structured programmes and policy. These actions are sometimes referred to as autonomous, as opposed to planned, responses to climate change.

Location of the sites of the case studies



Conceptual Framework for Adaptation Planning

Adaptation planning aims to enhance the effectiveness of institutional systems in building adaptive capacity. This requires clarity around the specific roles of different institutions and the ways in which they interact with one another to enable or disable the development of adaptive capacity. The conceptual framework aims at addressing this gap in understanding, particularly in terms of the interfaces between formal and informal institutions, and local and national scales. Adaptation effectiveness is determined by the interface between the formal and informal, public, private, and civic institutions that operate at different scales of adaptation planning.





Enhancing Institutional Interfaces

A number of institutions have a role to play in adaptation planning. Depending on the extent to which there is a match between the aims and comparative advantages of different institutions, the interface between institutions can be supportive, non-supportive, or non-existent. An aim of adaptation planning should be to enable and facilitate supportive interfaces where possible. This includes enhancing institutional interaction where it does exist; creating incentives for interfaces where they do not exist; and creating synergies in cases where interfaces are competitive.

Enabling Environment for Autonomous Adaptation

Communities in the region are already adapting to changes, including climate change. These autonomous adaptations require an enabling policy environment in the context of the uncertainty and complexity of climate change. The major challenge in establishing an effective policy environment for planned adaptation is that it is likely to require a long period of trial and error during which autonomous adaptation strategies will be the first line of defence for many vulnerable people.

Key Findings

- Climate change and variability increase uncertainty and risks, as well as promoting opportunities in livelihood systems, particularly for people dependent on agriculture for their livelihood.
- Markets and government policy have a greater impact on enhancing the adaptive capacity of communities than climate change awareness.
- Policy environments and institutions need to consider short-term responses and long-term strategies to match the pace of climate change and changes caused by other drivers, and to meet new needs for highly adaptive and resilient systems.
- A proper strategy to translate sectoral policies into local-level planning will facilitate development initiatives to address local adaptation needs.
- Structural disaster mitigation measures supported by non-structural measures, with the support and participation of local communities, enhance quick response and improve people's adaptive capacity.
- Local-level institutions and indigenous systems, with the support of non-governmental organizations, can enhance local adaptive capacity.
- Diversifying agricultural production and livelihood systems, including labour migration, is one of the ways that communities can build resilience and adapt to economic and climatic shocks and shifts.

Comparative advantages of institutions in building adaptive capacity

Institutional realm	Comparative advantage in relation to adaptive capacity
Public Example: Bureaucratic agencies and elected bodies	Public sector institutions are more likely to facilitate adaptation strategies related to communal pooling, diversification, and storage owing to their command over authoritative action, and ability to channel technical and financial inputs into rural areas.
Private Example: Service organisations and private businesses	Private sector organisations, because of their access to financial resources, are more likely to have greater expertise in promoting market exchange and diversification, but may also be able to advance communal pooling if one takes into account not-for-profit service organisations.
Civic Example: NGOs, cooperatives, and membership organisations	Civic sector institutions can strengthen different adaptation responses as a result of their greater flexibility in redefining goals and adopting new procedures.

Recommendations

The adaptation policy environment can be supportive of local responses in a number of ways.

- Develop effective institutional arrangements.
- Establish, designate, and strengthen the role of focal institutions.
- Disseminate climate information to service delivering institutions.
- Capture demands and ensure service delivery.
- Engage public participation.
- Build capacity at various levels.
- Improve access to livelihood diversification.
- Support community level responses.
- Disburse resources at the community level.



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